

Lamp in the Hand¹

Graeme Wahn

October 31 — November 28, 2020
There will be no opening reception due to social distancing measures

Haptic images dance on the surface of the eye. An analogy to the physical world interacts with the body to produce pre-conscious images that reside in the *virtual* realm of affect. The traces of such images—fleeting and elusive—appear only for a moment, for the very process of identification produces a paradox wherein conscious recognition of the image causes its dissolution. The haptic image glimpses what is beyond optical vision and embodies what is *felt* and *seen*.

The mystery of the missing half-second is a phenomenon that Brian Massumi muses on while having observed a medical experiment monitoring brain and skin responses to electric stimulation. When researchers administered mild electric pulses to either an electrode in the brain or on the skin, they found that stimulation had to last for at least a half-second to be perceived by patients. A moment less and the pulse would not be registered as anything at all. Even “if the cortical electrode was fired a half-second before the skin was stimulated, patients [still] reported feeling the skin pulse first.”² So the obvious question becomes: what happens during the missing half second?

It is during this half second that the body exerts free will outside of consciousness by choosing to veto a response to stimulation after it arises if it is deemed unnecessary or unimportant. “In other words, the half-second is missed not because it is empty, but because it is overfull, in excess of the actually performed action and of its ascribed meaning.”³ Imagine the body as a radically open vessel that funnels and reduces the complexities of the world for conscious resonances and experience. This process of elimination is possible because of the traces of past actions, and their contexts, that are conserved “in the brain and in the flesh.”⁴

The result is the space of affect where pastness (through an accumulation of action) “opens onto a future, but with no present to speak of. For the present is lost with the missing half-second, passing too quickly, actually, to have happened.”⁵ If something does *actually* happen too quickly to have happened at all, it then slips into the *virtual*. The virtual body, in this case, is the realm of potential. Futurity

becomes intertwined with pastness and incipient actions coexist with their opposites to produce “a lived paradox where [...] what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt.”⁶ This ambiguous territory is home to the haptic image. Straddling the line between the actual and the virtual, the haptic image exists in multiple worlds simultaneously and balks at the absurdity of reality as a fixed state.

In the keynote lecture of the 2014 ABOAGORA symposium (Turku, Finland), British filmmaker Peter Greenaway proclaimed “the cinema is dead, long live the cinema!”⁷ Greenaway gleefully spouted this intentionally misleading statement as a means to provoke his audience just long enough before he explained himself. Often criticized for his focus on film’s structure as opposed to content, Greenaway’s inflammatory statement calls for the death of text-based cinema so that an image-based cinema can rise to its rightful place on the silver screen.

*All film writers should be shot!*⁸ By asserting that most films start from the written word, Greenaway believes that modern day cinema is more akin to literature than visual art; as a result, cinema forgoes many of the properties it inherits from, say, painting to become a version of illustrated text. This distinction between a text-based and image-based cinema shares qualities of the actual and virtual image respectively. Indeed, by embracing the non-linear qualities of image making, Greenaway’s films are pushed into the realm of the virtual where visual harmony supersedes traditional narrative logic.

In *Drowning by Numbers* (1988) the three female protagonists—all named Cissie Colpitts—are assumed to be grandmother, mother, and daughter; however, it is inferred that they are actually the same woman at three different moments in her life, repeating the same mistakes. Here the past collides with the future in such a way where the depicted “present” becomes dislodged from linearity like a swirling wormhole. By manipulating the rules of space and time inside the narrative, Greenaway forces the viewer to question the structure of the entire film.

The Greek Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope once famously walked through the streets of Athens carrying a lantern in broad daylight. With his *lamp in hand*, a frenetic Diogenes illuminated and inspected the faces of local passers-by in the marketplace. When asked what he was doing he exclaimed “I’m on the lookout for an honest man!”⁹ This philosophical stunt was meant to imply that humans had failed to live up to humanity’s potential for honesty and virtue; and that culture was a cacophony of injustice,

exploitation, and inhumanity. In the tradition of the Cynics, Diogenes was a force that pushed against society's status quo often through brutal honesty and absurdity.

Lamp in the Hand, Graeme Wahn's first solo exhibition in Toronto, presents photographs, drawings, and sculpture made in the artist's own search for truth through absurdity. Here, Diogenes' lantern becomes a metaphor for the entire photographic process.

The photographs in the exhibition present images of the everyday that appear mediated to the viewer through the apparatus of the camera. A growing plant, a backlit ball cap, and a funeral parlour window are represented anew through the use of infrared film, cyanotype, and a malfunctioning lens. Representation turns into figuration and technical error becomes potentiality. Wahn describes this process of transformation as a type of dissociated relaxation whereby moving through the world becomes open to chance, mishaps, and happy accidents. In season 9, episode 1 of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* Leon explains to Larry that he is *laminin*, a level of relaxation that Larry is not familiar with. At first confused, Larry—a modern day Diogenes character—accepts that *laminin* is a deeper level of relaxation than simply *chillin*. Wahn's own version of *laminin* is in collaboration with the *lamp in hand*.

A selection of six drawings are spread throughout the gallery. Consisting of spirograph ink patterns and rough graphite sketches translated from Wahn's own archive as well as magazines and book covers. These works indicate to the viewer that images can appear by means beyond photography. Patterns emerge out of mechanical reproduction and intersecting line work becomes a system for potentiality where chance can flourish. There are also several hand made sculptural works installed throughout the gallery. These woodblock compositions are made intuitively and quickly when the body leads the mind towards formal assemblage and embodied gesture.

The variety of media assembled by Wahn coalesce inside the exhibition to open up a space between works that crest “in a liminal realm of emergence, where half-actualized actions and expressions arise like waves on a sea to which most no sooner return.”¹⁰ Like a soft glance in peripheral vision, the haptic image is not on display in Wahn’s work but rather invoked by it. The exhibited works show what the eye can already see in broad daylight; however, perhaps through a secondary light—such as the lantern or the camera—the viewer can glimpse the absurd truth of the haptic image.

About Pumice Raft:

a **pumice raft** is an ecological phenomenon that usually follows an underwater volcanic eruption. Amongst the lava, plumes of pumice stones slowly float to the surface of the ocean. If the wind is calm the individual stones form what some sailors have reported as floating islands that appear out of nowhere. The pumice raft has even been known to ferry flora and fauna to new shores. More than an illusion on the horizon, a pumice raft represents a vessel, a conduit, a vehicle; its very constitution cultivates an environment where things can come together in the spirit of collaboration.

Pumice Raft is also an alter ego, a lecture series, a tool, but most recently a non-profit space in Tkaronto ON, Canada that advocates for an ecological approach to the display of visual art and the facilitation of related education. The physical space of Pumice Raft currently resides on the land of the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat, and the Anishinabewaki ᐈᓇᐦᑲᐸᓪ.

About the artists:

Graeme Wahn is an artist living and working on the unceded territories of the Syilx/Okanagan peoples. He holds an MFA from Simon Fraser University ('19), and a BFA From Emily Carr University of Art & Design ('15). His practice stems from ongoing engagements with photographic processes however now, his work looks towards alternative optical formations as means to pressure ways in which one can see, make, or be in new images of the world. He is currently a sessional faculty member at the University of the Fraser Valley (Abbotsford) and has exhibited widely throughout Vancouver, most notably with solo and group exhibitions at venues including the Vancouver Art Gallery, TRAPP Projects, CSA Space, UNIT/PITT Society for Art and Critical Awareness, Audain Gallery and Polygon Gallery in North Vancouver.

End Notes:

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0l5gqiW9n4&feature=youtu.be>
 2. Massumi, Brian. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique: The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II*, 31 (1995): 89.
 3. Ibid, 90.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid, 91.
 6. Ibid.
 7. Aboagora, "Peter Greenaway: The Cinema is Dead, Long Live the Cinema" YouTube Video, 2:11:02, October 10, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BluXxpF3OP4>.
 8. BAFTA Guru, "Peter Greenaway on his filmmaking style & career | A Life In Pictures" Youtube Video, 58:40, September 23, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SK8RcscVu5I&t=6s>.
 9. *Anecdotes of the Cynics*, trans. Robert Dobbin (London: Penguin Classics, 2016) 32.
 10. Massumi, Brian. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique: The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II* 31 (1995): 92.



Lamp in the Hand @ Pumice Raft, Toronto
October 31 - November 28 2020



EXIT



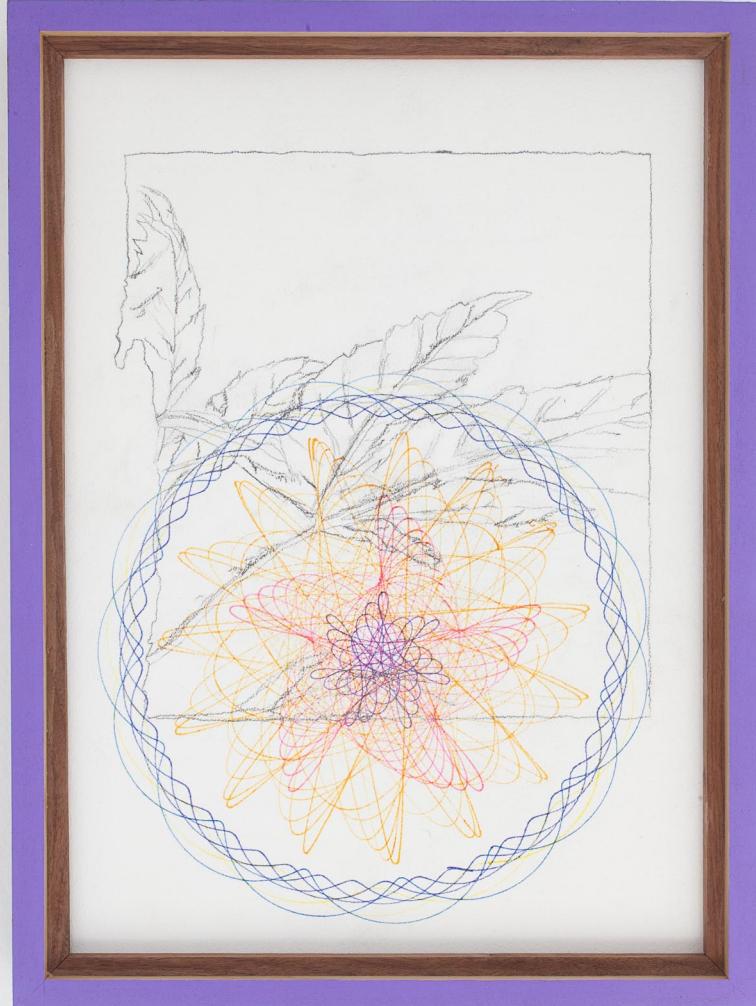




Untitled (Growing Vege, Infrared)
Inkjet print
101.6cm x 91.4cm x 10.2cm (40 x 36 x 4 inches)
Edition of 3
2020



Mental Pole Drawings VI
graphite and pen on watercolour paper
32.6cm x 27.3cm x 5.1cm (14.25 x 10.75 x 2 inches)
1/1
2020



Mental Pole Drawings V
graphite and pen on watercolour paper
32.6cm x 27.3cm x 5.1cm (14.25 x 10.75 x 2 inches)
1/1
2020



Absurd Torch

Inkjet print

92.7cm x 62.9cm x 10.2cm (36.5 x 24.7 x 4 inches)

1/3

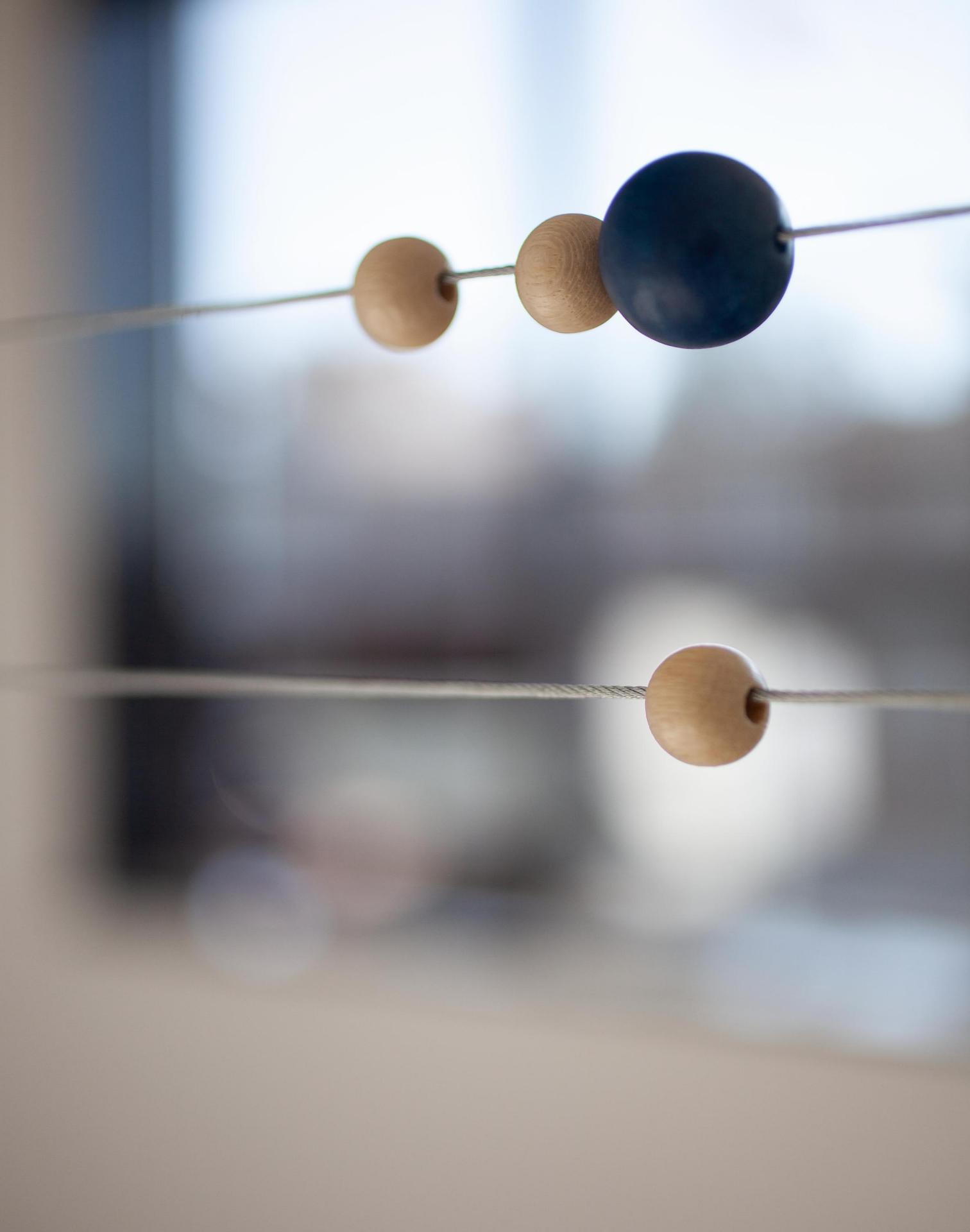
2020













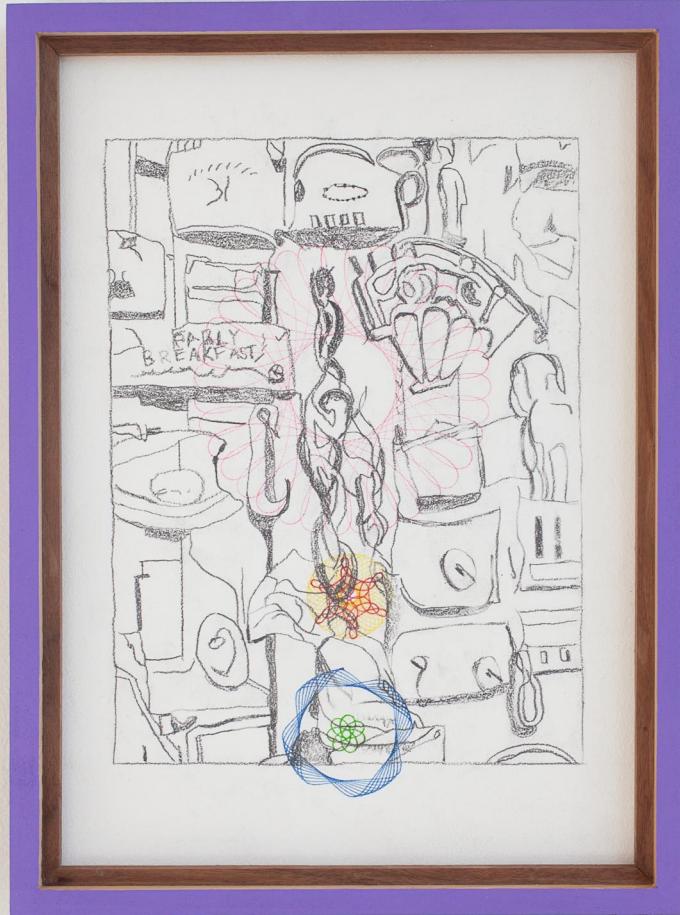


Mental Pole Drawings IV
graphite and pen on watercolour paper
32.6cm x 27.3cm x 5.1cm (14.25 x 10.75 x 2 inches)
1/1
2020

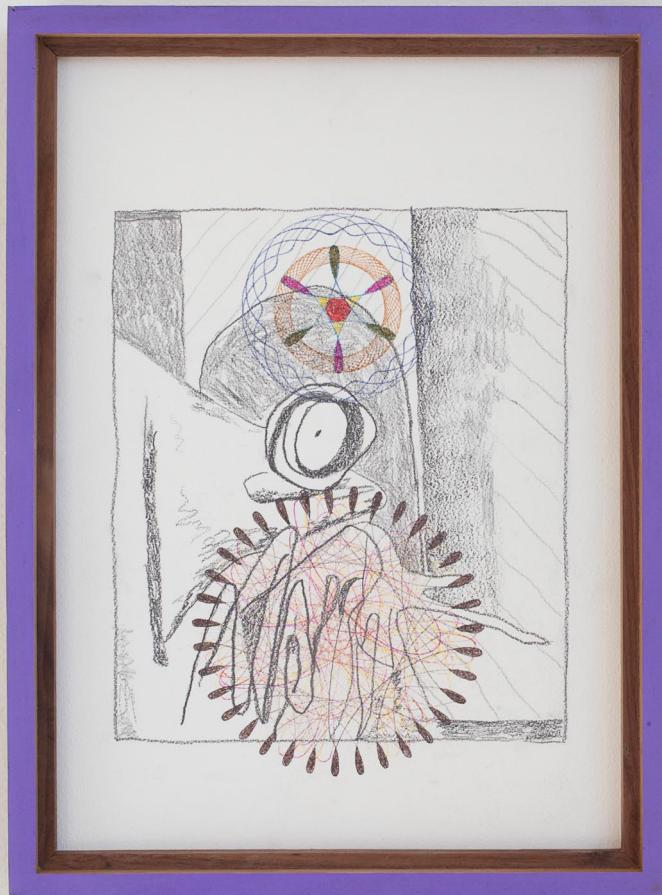


Mental Pole Drawings III
graphite and pen on watercolour paper
32.6cm x 27.3cm x 5.1cm (14.25 x 10.75 x 2 inches)
1/1
2020





Mental Pole Drawings II
graphite and pen on watercolour paper
32.6cm x 27.3cm x 5.1cm (14.25 x 10.75 x 2 inches)
1/1
2020



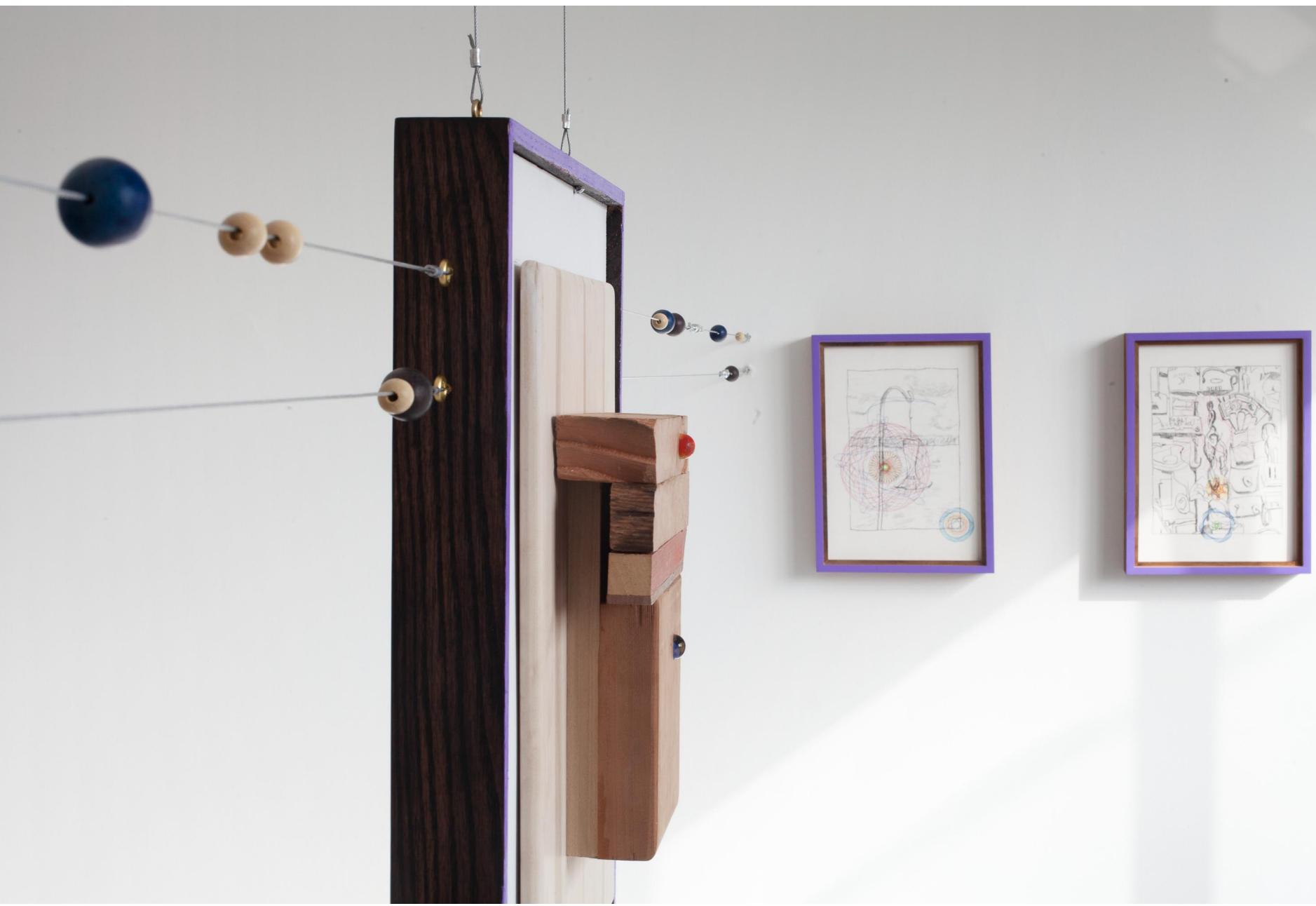
Mental Pole Drawings I
graphite and pen on watercolour paper
32.6cm x 27.3cm x 5.1cm (14.25 x 10.75 x 2 inches)
1/1
2020













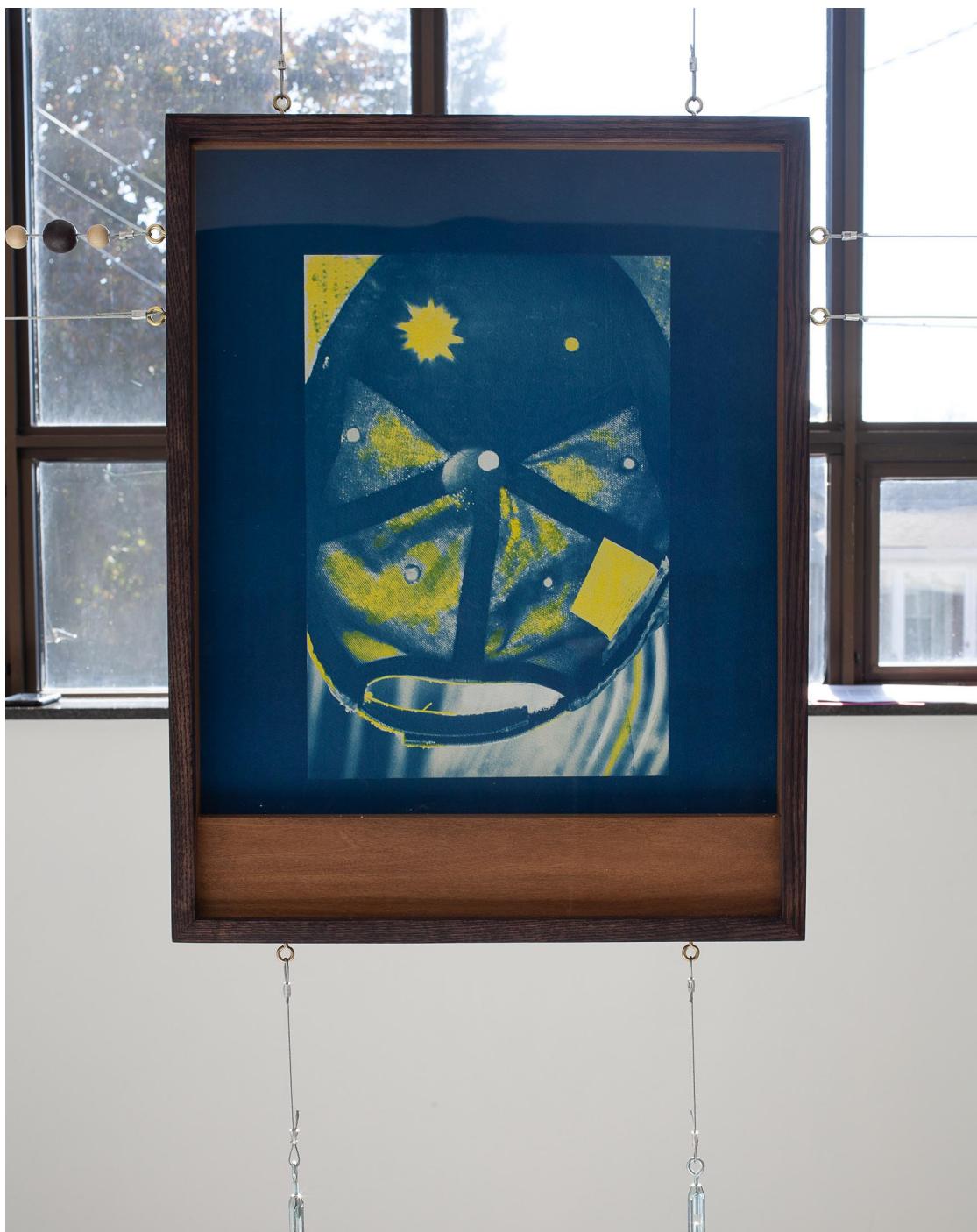
Third Space (Cabin)

Inkjet print mounted on dibond, plywood

43.2cm x 50.8cm x 6.4cm (17 x 20 x 2.5 inches)

1/3

2020



Cap & Light

Cyanotype with Gouache on watercolour paper
17.5cm x 24.7cm x 10.2cm (17 x 20 x 4 inches)

1/1

2019-2020

EXIT

